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Viewing cable 06AMMAN3564, SOCIALIST PARTY LEADER ON HOW PS-LED FRANCE WOULD

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06AMMAN3564	2006-05-21 08:53	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Amman

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/07/2015
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: SOCIALIST PARTY LEADER ON HOW PS-LED FRANCE WOULD
APPROACH U.S.: "NEITHER BLAIR NOR CHIRAC"

REF: PARIS 3725

Classified By: Ambassador Craig Stapleton for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Socialist Party (PS) First Secretary Francois Hollande and PS National Secretary for International Affairs Pierre Moscovici briefed the Ambassador June 8 on the turbulent race for the presidential nomination within the PS and the hurdles facing the party as it looks to next year's presidential and legislative elections. Hollande underlined that, notwithstanding Poitou-Charentes Region President Segolene Royal's commanding lead today in polls, both among the public at large and among PS members, PS members' convictions as to which PS leader "is best placed to beat Sarkozy" could well change between now and the PS's presidential primary in November. Hollande nonetheless believed the primary would produce a clear cut result, "probably in just one round." Asked what might be expected from French foreign policy under a socialist government, Hollande used the phrase "neither Blair and Chirac" to characterize an overall stance towards the U.S. that would not be uncritically supportive, but also not be gratuitously obstructionist. On Europe, Moscovici stressed that a Socialist president and government would be much more pro-Europe than President Chirac and the government of Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin. END SUMMARY.

ATMOSPHERICS

¶2. (C) Over breakfast with the Ambassador at the residence on June 8, Socialist Party (PS) First Secretary Francois Hollande and PS National Secretary for International Affairs Pierre Moscovici were confident, optimistic and dismissive of the drumbeat of media reports that insist that frictions and divisions within the PS will make it difficult for the party to close ranks behind a single candidate for the 2007 presidential race even after the party primary next November.

UPCOMING ELECTIONS WILL BE HARD FOUGHT

¶3. (C) Hollande and Moscovici predicted that the 2007 presidential and legislative elections would be particularly hard fought because neither of the two major parties "can count on more than 30 percent of the electorate." (Note: The center-left PS and the center-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) are the preponderant parties in a political spectrum that includes the small, centrist Union for French Democracy (UDF) party along with a range of micro parties. Indeed, if the pattern of past presidential elections holds in 2007, there will be over a dozen candidates competing in the first round of the election. End note.) Hollande suggested that, since neither of the major parties can aspire to majority status, the UDF might well find itself with leverage beyond its size, particularly if in the legislative elections that follow the presidential election, neither the PS nor the UMP win a near majority of seats. Hollande added that, in both the presidential and legislative elections, the Communist Party (PC) and other far-left parties "would vote against the right," but not join in any socialist government in the event of a PS-led legislature.

¶4. (C) Hollande expressed his firm conviction that the PS was well-positioned to win both the presidential and legislative contests, but that both elections will be extremely close. Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, barring an unexpected reverse, would be the center-right's candidate, and -- according to Hollande -- will benefit from the active support of President Chirac, "if Sarkozy is nice to him." That is, according to Hollande, if Sarkozy agrees to look after Chirac loyalists and, by implication, Chirac himself. (Note: Chirac will lose his immunity from prosecution upon leaving office; corruption charges for political financing activities dating from before he became president remain pending against him. End note.) Hollande said that he did not believe that Chirac would prefer to see the PS candidate take the presidency rather than see Sarkozy become his successor. Even so, Hollande also spoke of the bitterly personal, "fratricidal" rivalries on the center-right, comparing them to the less personal, more ideological

rivalries in his center-left, PS.

THE CHALLENGE OF REFORM WITHOUT A MANDATE

¶ 15. (C) Hollande said that whoever wins the presidency in 2007, the electoral system and divisions in the electorate are such that the victor will not have a "mandate for reform," and certainly not a mandate in the majority rule/winner-takes-all "American" sense of the term. This meant that reforms would come slowly, if at all. However, Hollande also ruled out the possibility of a president from one party and a parliamentary majority from another, saying that he believed the back-to-back presidential and legislative elections would both reflect the voters' decision for change. This would help, Hollande said, to bring about some significant reforms, albeit slowly.

UPBEAT ABOUT THE STATE OF THE PS

¶ 16. (C) Hollande was bullish and buoyant about the state of the PS. He pointed to the party's recent consensus on its "project for 2007" -- a platform statement that all the party's presidential hopefuls agreed to with little argument -- as evidence of the party's stability and unity, even as he allowed that it would not be binding on the various candidates. Hollande and Moscovici agreed that recent meetings to hammer out the platform were, by PS standards, rather non-eventful, and the press coverage of rejection of proposals by Royal and others "highly exaggerated."

¶ 17. (C) Hollande proudly underlined the policy statement's call for enhanced social programs, while admitting, when pressed, that implementing everything it calls for might prove a little "expensive." (Comment: Indeed, differences over the likely cost of the PS's electoral program (Hollande cites the figure of 30 billion Euros, whereas Strauss-Kahn has said the price tag is closer to 50 billion) are sure to fuel controversy over the proposal and PS candidate's commitment to implementing it if elected. End Comment.) Hollande added that the electoral program's "social dimension" could help the PS attract center-right "Gaullist voters" disaffected with the UMP's free-market liberalism.

PREDICTS A ONE-ROUND PRIMARY

¶ 18. (C) Hollande confidently predicted that the PS would unify behind whoever wins the primary in the interest of victory -- though he conceded that primaries can sometimes weaken rather than strengthen a candidate. He defended the November date for party's choosing of a candidate, saying that, had the candidate been chosen now, he/she would have been subjected to a potentially crippling drumbeat of criticism from the right. Hollande also confidently predicted that the PS's November primary would produce a clear cut winner, "probably in just one round." Hollande said that, above all, party members "want a winner" and will therefore support the candidate most likely to beat Sarkozy in a putative, second round run-off.

ROYAL

¶ 19. (C) Hollande strongly implied that that candidate could easily be Royal, saying that if the primary were held today, "she will win and be the candidate," barring a sharp downturn in her popularity in the pitiless triage of an intensifying presidential campaign. Hollande noted that Royal is not part of the traditional party establishment, and commented that the attacks against her have only served to make her all the more popular. Referring to her opponents among the socialists, Hollande said that those who resented her sudden success, and took cheap shots at her, were as a practical matter, "acting as her allies." Hollande wondered out loud if her popularity would last, accurately identifying that as the key question about her candidacy. Several times he mentioned the unpredictability of politics, making clear that he believed much could happen between now and next May's first round of the presidential election that could turn upside down "the

givens of today." In particular, Hollande evoked how a major international crisis -- he gave Iran as an example -- might completely change the dynamics of the upcoming elections.

CAREFUL NOT TO RULE OUT HIS OWN CANDIDACY

¶10. (C) Hollande was careful to make clear that he too was prepared to run as a unifying candidate, but only if it seemed to him he would be likely to win the party primary -- hands down in the first round. He was categorical in ruling out that that he would not/not run "out of pride" or "to get 10 percent of the vote." (Comment: Clearly, the only circumstances under which Hollande would be likely to win big in the primary, is if Royal for some reason drops out. End Comment.)

FABIUS

¶11. (C) Hollande contrasted his "team player" attitude with what he dismissively called former prime minister Laurent Fabius' "accountant" mentality, saying, "just because 20 percent of the party supports him, he thinks that entitles him to 20 percent of whatever the party does." Almost as an afterthought, Hollande added "no matter what, Fabius will run."

EUROPE

¶12. (C) Moscovici said that a PS administration would be much more pro-Europe than President Chirac and Prime Minister de Villepin (see also reftel). Both Hollande and Moscovici saw a need to use Europe to consolidate defense industries and reduce defense expenditures through economies of scale. Hollande noted sardonically that France was unable to sell its fighters and tanks to anyone. Moscovici saw a need for an increased parliamentary role in policy-making related to Europe, complaining that there was currently too much power concentrated in the presidency. Hollande described the absurd situation where the prime minister, who does not participate in European Council meetings, represents the government during the question-and-answer sessions in the National Assembly to defend policies set by the President. Hollande did not disagree with timeline set by Chirac and German Chancellor Merkel for getting Europe back on its feet in 2007-2008, noting the importance of the Franco-German tandem and saying that, if the effort failed, it would take another 4-5 years to come up with something new.

¶13. (C) Both Hollande and Moscovici made clear they that they believed Chirac had no credibility for proposing anything now to advance the European project, and both dismissed the idea that the rejected constitution could be subjected to a second referendum or, worse in their view, passed through parliament. Holland and Moscovici agreed something new would be required "to get Europe moving again," but they had nothing specific to suggest. In the interim, Moscovici suggested, it might be possible to use Croatian accession to introduce a few institutional reforms that could be approved by the parliaments of member states. Hollande dismissed Sarkozy's ideas for having the six largest EU members states play a leading role in setting policy, saying they were based on outmoded ideas of "great powers" setting policy for "little powers".

FRANCE) U.S. RELATIONS

¶14. (C) Hollande gave a slightly different version of the argument we usually hear that, while the French at a large disagree with the U.S. intervention in Iraq, Chirac and Villepin should nonetheless not have confronted the U.S. so openly. Hollande argued that Chirac erred by not making it clear from the beginning how far he was prepared to go to oppose the U.S. If Chirac had communicated more clearly how strongly he felt about the matter, it would not have led to the false impression that France might come along in the end. Moscovici repeated his calls for dialogue aimed at attempting to find agreement when the U.S. and France should

differ, adding that differences should be the exception and not the rule. Hollande said he wanted a French foreign policy more firmly rooted in universal values, such as support for democracy, rather than the highly personalized approach which characterized the Chirac years.

COMMENT

¶115. (C) There are those among the PS's heavyweights, -- Strauss-Kahn, Fabius and their supporters -- who believe that Hollande is subtly, successfully shaping developments so that the PS candidate will wind up being either Royal or himself. Commentators and party insiders refer to this pair of possible outcomes as the "popularity" and "institutional" options. In the case of the first, Royal successfully uses her popularity with the public to impose herself on the party as its candidate. If, however, Royal and her popularity should for some reason falter, revealing a deeply splintered party with no attractive candidates (the situation before her emergence as the clear front-runner), then the "institutional" option -- turning to the party leader to lead the party in the election -- could become a viable one.

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